

Which are the Best Nursing Facilities in Northern Virginia?

Selecting a nursing facility can be a very difficult decision. Unfortunately, this decision is often made during a time of crisis, such as when a person is ready to leave the hospital, but can no longer live independently or requires short-term rehabilitation. There are many resources that you may consult before selecting a nursing facility.

One of the best sources of information is your local long-term care ombudsman program. Ombudsmen visit nursing facilities on a regular basis, investigate concerns, advocate for residents, and mediate disputes between residents and facilities. The Ombudsman Program often has very good knowledge about the quality of life and care in nursing facilities in their area.

“Which are the best nursing facilities in the area?” is one of the most common questions that the Northern Virginia Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program staff receives. In program year 2002, over 4,300 requests for information came in from the public. A significant part of our service is to educate consumers so they can make informed choices about long-term care facilities, such as nursing facilities.

The Ombudsman cannot recommend one nursing facility over another. The perception of “good care” or “an attractive facility” or “appetizing meals” often varies from person to person. People may focus on different features of a facility when seeking long-term care, and the decision of where to “make one’s home” is a very individual choice. However, the ombudsman serves as a reliable and credible source with specific information about long-term care facilities. We discuss services available in the region and how to access them; costs and public benefits; admission and discharge procedures; and rights of consumers of long-term care.

The ombudsman also can provide information, such as the results of the nursing facility’s latest survey conducted by Virginia’s Department of Health. The survey report identifies areas where a facility did not meet the standard of the regulation. This is known as a deficiency (i.e., pattern of a problem). The most recent survey report is also posted in the nursing facility and is available for the public to review.

In addition, the ombudsman can provide information regarding the number and nature of complaints lodged against a facility within the last 15 months as well as the results and conclusions of those investigations. For example, a caller can name a specific nursing facility, assisted living facility, or home care organization, and the ombudsman will disclose our Program’s record of complaints that we investigated. No identifying information is given that could compromise confidentiality. For example, a typical response from the ombudsman is, “Nursing Facility X has one complaint in our ‘Resident Care’ category concerning ‘unanswered help calls.’ The complaint was verified, and it was resolved to the satisfaction of the parties involved.” The complaints that we cite are cases that staff has formally investigated or mediated. This information is also available on our web site at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/ombudsman by clicking on the “Ombudsman Formal Complaints Log”.

Finally, the ombudsman can provide general advice on what to look for when selecting a nursing facility. All of this information gives callers an idea of a facility's performance record and educates them about the selection process. This allows the callers to draw their own conclusions about the quality of care at a specific facility.

Another lesser known service that the Ombudsman Program provides is that of educational presentations. We inform community groups about how to choose long-term care services, consumer rights, and steps for problem resolution. We make presentations about various topics including residents' rights for staff working in at long-term care, home care recipients' rights, communicating with residents with impairments, and abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Our staff is also available to educate long-term care residents about their rights.

For our readers who thought that the Ombudsman Program strictly handled long-term care complaints, we hope that this information has been enlightening. We do that, and much more! There are five of us on staff and 65 volunteers based at area facilities. Feel free to call us at 703-324-5861.